

# A New Year in a New Community

## Duxbury's First Synagogue Celebrates High Holidays

By Lesley Mahoney

Jewish people all over the world began the new year 5757 last weekend with Rosh Hashanah and will continue the High Holidays Sunday with Yom Kippur, considered the holiest day of the year.

"It is a new year, a new beginning. I have a lot of hope."  
— Kenneth Stone, congregation member

Congregation Shirat Hayam is no exception. What makes its celebration remarkable is that Duxbury's first Jewish congregation is welcoming the new year as a new community.

"It was a very moving experience to be able to start a new Jewish year with a new synagogue," said Fred Kugel, who founded the congregation last April.

"It's been a wonderful experience," agreed his wife, Debbie Kugel. "It's like a new birth. We've

worked really hard. It feels like we've arrived.

"It's been very empowering for us to realize we can do this — to start a new congregation and have the kind of support we have," she added.

Fred Kugel founded the Reconstructionist congregation out of frustration with his former synagogue when he learned the rabbi there didn't accept his children as

Jewish because his wife is a former Catholic who never formally converted to Judaism. The rabbi at Congregation Beth Jacob in Plymouth, a Reform synagogue, held that having a Jewish mother is the only way a child can inherit Judaism.

Since then, Kugel has been hard at work developing the Duxbury congregation, whose

Reconstructionist philosophy holds that Jewish identity can be transferred through either parent and that conversion is unnecessary for the child when he or she is raised and educated as a Jew.

For Bill Goldenberg and Susan Nelligan, Rosh Hashanah meant a new year with a new congregation in their new community. They

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Rabbi Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, at Duxbury Beach with 2-1/2-year-old Max, directs members of Congregation Shirat Hayam to cast off their sins to welcome the new year.

Staff Photo by Chris Bernstein

# Shirat *Continued*

moved to Duxbury only a few weeks ago and were happy to find Congregation Shirat Hayam. As they noted, there aren't many temples on the South Shore.

"To find one in Duxbury was really a bonus," Nelligan said.

A Catholic, Nelligan appreciates that the congregation is Reconstructionist since she and Goldenberg are raising their daughter, Phoebe Goldenberg, Jewish.

Kenneth Stone of Braintree is also a new member of the congregation. He called last weekend "joyous."

"It is a new year, a new beginning. I have a lot of hope," he

said. "This congregation has the sense of community I've been looking for."

Fran Cantor said she never belonged to a synagogue before joining Congregation Shirat Hayam because she had never found one that was inclusive of her ideas as a woman.

Prior to last weekend, Congregation Shirat Hayam had held Sabbath services in July and August. But Rosh Hashanah marked the first big holiday for the community, which operates out of and holds its services at the Old Town Hall.

On Saturday afternoon, as part of Rosh Hashanah, members of the congregation tossed bread

into the ocean from Duxbury Beach for Tashlich, which means "cast off" in Hebrew. In the self-purification ceremony, the bread represents sins to cast off.

Following the ceremony, bits of bread lined the shore and Rabbi Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus reflected on the unique quality of this particular Tashlich ceremony. While it is always performed at a body of water, he said it was appropriate for this one to take place by the sea, since Congregation Shirat Hayam means "song of the sea" in Hebrew.

Brumberg-Kraus also said he was moved witnessing what he called a real mix of people from

all generations come together as a community to make the congregation work.

He said the advantage of a new synagogue is that its members are "very conscious of knowing they have to make it work for themselves."

Brumberg-Kraus called the congregation the product of a lot of people and a lot of work.

Services for Yom Kippur, which begins at sundown Sunday, will be held Sunday evening, Monday morning and Monday evening.

The holiday of Sukkot begins Friday, Sept. 27, and marks the season of rejoicing.

## CHURCHES

*Duxbury Mariner*  
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## Reconstructionists Search for Contemporary Meaning in Traditions

There are about 100 Reconstructionist congregations in the United States, according to Congregation Shirat Hayam founder Fred Kugel.

Congregation Shirat Hayam is the sixth Reconstructionist congregation in Massachusetts and the only one in Plymouth County.

Kugel estimated that a little more than 50 percent of the congregation's members are from Duxbury. The others come from Cohasset, Marshfield,

Bridgewater, Carver, Pembroke, Kingston, Norwell, Braintree, Scituate and Plymouth.

While Reconstructionist Jews hold strong commitments to the shared heritage of Judaism, Kugel said, they are committed to searching for contemporary meaning.

Accordingly, Congregation Shirat Hayam defines itself as "inclusive, open minded and democratic" and encourages intellectual openness.

The movement also works

actively in conflict resolution, civil rights, hunger and environmental issues.

Rabbi Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus said the Reconstructionist movement offers more flexibility since it is less institutionalized than the other Judaic movements — Orthodox, Conservatist, and Reformist. The newness of Congregation Shirat Hayam only adds to this flexibility, Brumberg-Kraus said.

Reconstructionist congregations tend to be small, allowing families to be active in programs. Social equality for women and the

welcoming of interfaith couples are among the movement's characteristics.

"Many of our members are in a relationship in which only one of the partners is Jewish," Kugel said. "All are welcome into the community as members, and treated as members."

Brumberg-Kraus also said non-Jews within the congregation are active in leadership roles.

Kugel refers to this particular notion of inclusivity as one of the congregation's very important founding principles.

— Lesley Mahoney